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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HONG KONG 004610

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [HK](#) [CH](#) [VT](#)  
SUBJECT: CHINA ORDAINS THIRD "ILLCIT" BISHOP OF THE YEAR;  
ORDINATION SEEN AS "PROVOCATIVE"

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Classified By: E/P Chief Laurent Charbonnet

1. (C) Summary: Monsignor Eugene Nugent, the papal representative in Hong Kong, told us on December 1 that the installation of Wang Renlei, the Vicar General of the Xuzhou Diocese in Jiangsu Province, as the auxiliary bishop of the diocese was "quite worrying" and "provocative." The participation of two high-ranking religious affairs officials at Wang's installation ceremony signaled a "real snub" to the Vatican. Cardinal Zen told the Consul General that the Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA) had engaged in increasingly aggressive actions and that the PRC Government was failing to control it. According to Nugent, the Vatican belatedly heard of Wang's ordination and did not have time to properly vet his candidacy. Two Bishops from Hebei Province were deceived and taken from their home province to Xuzhou against their will; one escaped, while the other was forced to attend the ceremony. Ironically, the Church likely would have approved Wang as a Bishop if given the time to vet him properly, said Nugent. End Summary.

Beijing Installs Third "Illicit" Bishop of the Year  
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2. (C) Monsignor Eugene Nugent, the papal representative in Hong Kong, told us on December 1 that the installation of Wang Renlei, the Vicar General of the Xuzhou Diocese in Jiangsu Province, as the auxiliary bishop of the diocese was "quite worrying" because PRC authorities had assured the Vatican during Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli's June visit to Beijing that they would halt the illicit Bishop ordinations. The latest ordination, which lacked Holy See approval, was "very provocative" said Nugent, particularly since two high-ranking religious affairs officials, Director Ye Xiaowen of the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) and Vice Chairman Liu Bainian of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) also attended the ceremony. According to Nugent, this latest ordination was a "real snub" to the Vatican, which he expected would release a statement after the Pope and the Vatican Secretary of State returned to Rome from their official visit to Turkey.

3. (C) Nugent received news of the October 21 election (Wang was the sole candidate) in Xuzhou diocese via a third party on November 21. Two days later, Nugent learned that the ordination ceremony would take place on November 30 -- not enough time for the Vatican to properly vet Wang's candidacy -- and Nugent said he was surprised there had been no

attempts by anyone from the diocese to contact the Vatican earlier about the planned ordination ceremony. Nugent, questioning the need for "such haste," said the ordination had "come out of the blue" and also observed that 92-year old Bishop Qian Yurong of Xuzhou was old but still in good health.

#### Bishops Pressured to Attend Ceremony

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14. (C) Nugent emphasized that most Bishops and clergy are aware the Vatican disapproves of these illicit ordinations and many therefore do not willingly participate in the ceremonies, so religious officials often pressure clergy to attend. For Wang's installation ceremony, it appears that two Bishops from Hebei Province were deceived in their home province and taken against their will to Xuzhou. Li Liangui, Bishop of Cangshou (Xianxian) and Peter Feng Xinmao, Bishop of Hengshui, were told on November 29 by Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) officials that they would be taken to check on some previously confiscated Church property in Tianjin, according to a November 29 "AsiaNews" report. (Both Bishops belong to the official church, but also were approved by the Vatican.) Instead of driving to Tianjin, however, the Bishops were taken to Xuzhou.

15. (C) Nugent acknowledged that religious officials often pressured clergy, but said he had never heard of government officials resorting to "abduction." The whole incident was "like something out of a movie." Li was able to escape his minders and, according to a November 30 "AsiaNews" report, currently was in hiding. While Feng was forced to attend the ceremony, he reportedly did not take part in the ritual. At midnight, the night before the ceremony, Feng had been able to call Nugent by telling the security guards that he wanted to call the Vicar General of his diocese, in order to reassure him of his whereabouts and well-being. According to Feng, each of the Bishops was guarded by ten security

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officers, who prevented them from speaking to anybody. When asked whether Li might face some form of punishment for escaping, Nugent said that he wasn't worried about this, but noted that PRC officials might be "vindictive."

#### Liu Bainian Denies Abduction Allegation

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16. (C) After the ceremony, Liu Bainian denied media reports that some bishops had been forced to attend the ordination. Liu told the "Union of Catholic News" (UCAN) that Bishop Wang personally had invited the Bishops who attended the ceremony. Liu, responding to concerns that the Holy See had not been informed in a timely fashion of Wang's election as a bishop, also said, "the Vatican should have trust in the China Church -- that it would not approve a candidate that does not love the Church and the country."

#### Zen Criticizes Episcopal Ordination

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17. (C) Cardinal Joseph Zen told the Consul General on November 27 that he was very concerned about the current situation in China. During the conversation (which occurred before Wang's ordination had taken place) Zen noted that the Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA) had engaged in increasingly aggressive actions and that the PRC Government was failing to control it. Separately, Zen said the Pope had agreed to his recommendation that the Vatican hold a strategy session in Rome regarding the Holy See's policy towards China.

18. (C) After the ordination, Zen publicly criticized the Chinese religious officials and said that the latest ordination was even more serious than the first two. Not only did the Chinese break their assurances to the Vatican

delegation that they would halt illicit ordinations, but they had also used "threat, allurements, and deceit...(and) forceful abduction and kidnapping!" to coerce participation by the Bishops in the ceremony. In his statement, Zen asked the Chinese to "start a substantial dialogue with the Holy See to find a way acceptable to both the State and the Holy See."

Bishop Wang Renlei -- A "Nice Fellow"

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¶9. (C) Under normal circumstances, the Vatican takes several months to vet a candidate for Bishop; this usually involves communicating with people both inside and outside the diocese who are familiar with the candidate. With only one week to gather information about Wang, Nugent said that he was still working on getting a more complete picture of Wang from fellow clergy. According to one foreign priest/teacher, while at age 36 Wang was relatively young to be a Bishop, he nevertheless was a nice, spiritual, man of prayer who was committed to working for the good of the people. So far, said Nugent, he had not found anything negative about Wang that would disqualify him from Vatican approval. Despite this initial positive assessment, Nugent said that he found it strange that Wang had made no attempt to contact him or other Vatican officials regarding his impending installation as bishop, or to give the Vatican some warning of his election.

¶10. (C) Wang was born in Weishan, Shandong Province, which is only 58 kilometers north of Xuzhou, where he now resides. He studied at the Sheshan Regional Seminary in Shanghai (1989-1992) and was ordained a priest in 1996. He also studied at the National Seminary in Beijing and graduated in ¶1999.

Why Use Wang's Installation to Snub the Vatican?

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¶11. (C) Nugent said that he was not terribly surprised that PRC religious officials had chosen Wang's ordination as an opportunity to provoke the Holy See. (Comment: The illicit ordination of Bishop Ma Yinglin of Kunming Diocese, Sichuan Province, had made more "sense" especially in light of Ma's close ties to the PRC Government and the likelihood that the Vatican would have rejected him as a candidate. Wang, however, has no obvious marks against him and we are not aware of any ties to Chinese religious officials. End Comment.) Liu Bainian, said Nugent, also was a native of Shandong Province, traditionally considered a strong bastion

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of patriots. Nugent speculated that Liu wanted to make a symbolic point that a Bishop from his home province would be a patriotic Bishop.

¶12. (C) Father Peter Barry, a Researcher at the Holy Spirit Study Center, opined to poloff on December 1 that the latest illicit ordination might have been a response by the PRC Government to Cardinal Zen's remarks in the November issue of the "Far Eastern Economic Review" (FEER). Though Zen's overall prediction of where Asia was headed in the next ten years was quite positive, said Barry, he might have unintentionally upset PRC religious affairs officials with some of his comments. During the interview, Zen predicted that democracy would take root in Hong Kong and China and relations between the Holy See and the PRC would be reconciled by 2016. However, SARA and CCPA officials such as Ye and Liu, might have taken offense to Zen's remarks that the "illegal" ordinations of April and May were the final desperate acts of PRC religious affairs officials.

¶13. (C) According to Barry, the participation of Ye and Liu in Wang's installation ceremony signaled a clear, political backdrop to this ceremony. He speculated that there might be a struggle between two factions within the Government -- a

conciliatory faction interested in reconciliation with the Vatican and a leftist faction led by the religious affairs officials opposed to a change in the status quo. Wang's ceremony might also be viewed as a symbolic gesture by Ye and Liu to show the world that they were still in charge. Unfortunately, said Barry, these religious officials had shown that they were willing to use "outrageous" and "ridiculous" actions, such as kidnapping Bishops, in order to install a Bishop not approved by the Vatican. It made China seem like the wild, wild West; a civilized country would not act in this way in the year 2006, just two years prior to hosting the Olympics, said Barry.

#### Future Illicit Ordinations?

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¶14. (C) Nugent was aware of two other bishop ordinations, following their elections by their local diocese. However, as the Vatican was notified in a timely manner, those investigations were currently underway; barring something negative coming up during the vetting process, Nugent expected these two bishops to be installed with both Holy See and PRC approval.  
Cunningham